

TOP OUTDOOR PROJECT QUESTIONS

1. Do I need a permit to build a deck on my house?

Yes. All Decks no matter the size, need to be inspected for footing size and depth, girder and joist spans, attachments, and railing requirements.

2. I have an existing patio, can I build a deck on top of it?

No. A concrete patio is not generally designed to carry the load of the floor. Footings at load points will need to be cut through the slab or slab will have to be removed.

3. How deep do my footings have to be?

Footings must be a minimum 12 inches below grade or until good soil is established. Thickness and width of footing will be determined by the load requirements of the deck. Check out the [deck brochure](#) on MecPemit.com for more information.

4. Can I use 5/8" lag screws for fastening my deck to the house and posts?

No. 5/8-inch hot dipped galvanized through bolts with nut and washer or approved self-drilling screw fasteners are required. The self-drilling screws shall have a minimum shank diameter of 0.195" and a length long enough to penetrate through the supporting structure band. Screws shall have a shear load of 250 pounds and have corrosion resistant finish. Review our [deck brochure](#) online at or refer to the [2012 NC Residential Code amendments](#) at NC Department of Insurance website.

5. Do I need guard rails on my deck?

Guards shall be located along open-sided walking surfaces, including stairs, ramps and landings, that are located more than 30 inches measured vertically to the floor or *grade* below at any point within 36 inches horizontally to the edge of the open side. Insect screening shall not be considered as a *guard*.

6. How far apart do my pickets have to be?

The spacing between pickets shall not allow the passage of a 4-inch sphere to pass through the opening. This apply to horizontal and vertical pickets.

7. How many steps are required before I need a handrail?

Four or more steps will require a handrail. The actual deck will count as one of the steps in the run of stairs. Where the deck or steps is 30 inches or more above grade a guardrail is required. Call RTAC for more details.

8. How high does my hand rail have to be?

Hand railing on stairs are required to be a minimum of 34 inches and maximum of 38 inches and guardrails are a minimum 36 inches high.

9. Do I need joist hangers or ledger strip for my joists?

Yes. A minimum 1-1/2 inch ledger or joist hanger must support joists

10. Can my deck floor cantilever out over a dropped girder?

Yes. However, with recent code changes only No. 1 or better grade lumber shall be used for southern pine applications. Consult RTAC or Table R502.3.3(1) of the NC Residential Code Revised 01/2015.

11. Do I need a building permit to build a patio?

Generally no, however a zoning permit will be required. As long as the patio is level with the grade around it, then a building permit would not be required. If the patio is raised and creates a step higher than 8 1/4" to access the patio then a building permit is required.

12. Is a building permit required to build an outdoor wood burning fireplace or fire pit?

North Carolina Code does not require a permit for an outdoor wood burning fireplace as long as the chimney is not within 10' of any structures to include the overhang. Permits are not required for wood burning fire pits. Zoning permits may required for both so check with your zoning department before beginning your project. If the fireplace or fire pit is intended to be used with natural gas or propane then a mechanical permit would be required.

13. Do I need a permit to build an arbor/pergola?

Depending on the size and it's purpose. Call RTAC for details.

***If you're in doubt, reach out —
980-314-CODE (2633) ext. 2123***

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE AND ANY OTHER QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT THE RESIDENTIAL TECHNICAL ANSWER CENTER AT 980-314-CODE (2633) x.2123 or
Email: rtac@mecklenburgcountync.gov**

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MECKLENBURG COUNTY **Code Enforcement** **Commonly Asked** **Residential Questions**



Residential permitting and code questions that you may have about your own project.

FREQUENTLY ASKED RESIDENTIAL QUESTIONS

What are the building setbacks for my property?

A building setback is the required distance that a building (structure) must be located from the property lines of the adjacent property. The setbacks are determined by the appropriate zoning jurisdiction and based on the zoning district. Charlotte customers may call 704-336-7600 to process a request for a zoning setback determination. For customers outside the City of Charlotte jurisdiction, please contact the appropriate town's planning department.

Can I build my own house?

The State of North Carolina allows you to build your own home provided you personally will reside in the home and that it is not intended for rent or for sale within one year after you complete all construction. An affidavit is required to be signed and notarized before an application will be accepted. You will also have to be bonded with Mecklenburg County. For more information on bond accounts contact Revenue Collections at 980-314-(CODE)2633. As an option, you can choose to be the general contractor and hire all the sub-contractors to work for you or you can act as the general contractor and sub-contractors for all the trades as long as you are personally doing the work. When you apply for the building permit, you would list each licensed sub-contractor on your permit. The sub-contractors will schedule their own inspections and you will be responsible for scheduling the inspections for the building permit.

Can I add on to my house?

You can add on to your house if there is enough area on your property. Call zoning at 704-336-7600 for information regarding setbacks and space requirements for the addition. A Mecklenburg County Building Permit Application and plot plan are required to be submitted. If you are inside the City of Charlotte's zoning jurisdiction, you will be required to complete an additional zoning supplemental application for the city. This includes a cover page, heights elevation and a plot plan page. You can find these forms on MeckPermit.com at the following link, forms. Building plans must be submitted electronically for review if the addition exceeds 100 square feet. If the addition exceeds 335 sq ft or \$30,000.00 in cost and the homeowner is acting as the contractor, the homeowner will be required to have a bond account. Before permits will be issued.

How deep do my footings have to be?

A footing in Mecklenburg County must be at least 12 inches below grade, that is, the bottom of the concrete must be 12 inches below the surface. This must be inspected before any concrete is placed. If the soil is soft or not compacted well enough the usual solution is to dig deeper until you hit good hard dirt.

Do I need a permit for a storage shed or an accessory building?

A storage shed or an accessory building that exceeds 12 feet in any dimension is required to have a building permit. If the structure does not exceed the 12 feet requirement, then a permit is not required. However, no matter the size, all storage sheds or accessory buildings will require a zoning permit from the perspective jurisdiction. Call zoning at 704-336-7600

Do my plans have to be sealed by an architect or engineer?

Generally, residential plans do not require a seal from an architect or engineer if they prescriptively meet the NC Residential Code. When plans contain structural elements exceeding the limits of the NC Residential Code, or otherwise not conforming to this code, these elements shall be designed in accordance with accepted engineering practice. Plans would be required to be sealed by a design professional (architect or engineer) licensed in the State of North Carolina. In other words, if it is not described in the code book it will need to be sealed. Examples of this would be roof or floor truss systems, engineered wood beams like LVL's or steel beams, unusual foundations, unusual construction methods like log homes or timber framed structures and retaining walls meeting the requirements for a design professional.

When does a window have to be tempered?

Windows in hazardous locations require safety glazing which is usually tempered glass in residential construction. The code book describes 9 locations considered hazardous. Generally, it would be: glass in doors, a window within 2 feet of a door in the same wall plane, a window less than 18 inches to the floor with a single pane more than 9 square feet, any glass around a pool, hot tub, shower etc., windows near a stairway, railing or a landing. All of these locations would require tempered or other type of safety glazing.

What is the rise and run requirements for stairs?

The maximum rise or step height in NC is 8 1/4 inches. There is no minimum. The minimum tread depth is 9 inches with a 3/4-inch nosing. There is no maximum tread depth. A nosing is not required where the tread depth is a minimum of 11 inches.

Can I finish a room in an attic or basement?

It is possible to finish a room in the basement or the attic if it can be done in conformance with the current NC residential codes. A building, electrical, mechanical permit would be required. A plumbing permit would only be required if there is plumbing involved. A plan review is not required if the total cost is less than \$175,000. If the project is adding a second or third story to the house plan review would be required and a NC licensed engineer would have to inspect the foundation for soundness and its ability to carry the added load and provide drawings and/or a letter providing information on how to structurally add the new stories. There are egress, headroom and stair requirements also. Call RTAC for further details, 980.314.CODE (2633).

Can I have an outdoor range/grill in my screen porch?

A range is allowed if the range is rated for outdoor use and it has an exhaust hood and vent specified by the range manufacturer for use outdoors. The "rating" is only assigned to products which have been tested by an approved testing agency like UL or Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. for this type application. If this were a gas range, 2 permits would be required, electrical and mechanical.

How much insulation do I need?

In Mecklenburg County the insulation requirements are: R-19 in a floor above a crawl space or garage, R-13 in the exterior walls and R-30 in the attic.

Can I convert my deck into a sunroom?

Yes, It is possible to convert a deck into a sunroom., however there are many options that must be considered because of the increase of the additional weight. Without the support of a complete foundation, an engineer may be required for the design. Check out our sunroom brochure at meckpermit.com

Can I convert my open carport into a garage?

Yes, it is allowed. Because of the added wind loads that will be created by enclosing the carport, plan review will be required. This will require a full set of plans to be submitted along with the building permit application. For information on plan submittal see our Homeowner Brochure: When do I need a permit?